



The Ivy Education Center

LEAGUE

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SAT Essay Prompts (October 2007 - June 2008)

June 2008

Prompt 1

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Most of us are convinced that fame brings happiness. Fame, it seems, is among the things people most desire. We believe that to be famous, for whatever reason, is to prove oneself and confirm that one matters in the world. And yet those who are already famous often complain of the terrible burden of fame. In fact, making the achievement of fame one's life goal involves commitments of time and effort that are usually wasted.

Adapted from Leszek Kolakowski, *Freedom, Fame, Lying, and Betrayal: Essays on Everyday Life*

Assignment:

Does fame bring happiness, or are people who are not famous more likely to be happy? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 2

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

A society composed of men and women who are not bound by convention—in other words, they do not act according to what others say or do—is far more lively than one in which all people behave alike. When each person's character is developed individually and differences of opinion are acceptable, it is beneficial to interact with new people because they are not mere replicas of those whom one has already met.

Adapted from Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*

Assignment:

Is it better for a society when people act as individuals rather than copying the ideas and opinions of others? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 3

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

When someone has the same ideas or views as most people do, we tend to believe that the person is reasonable and correct. Often, however, views that are considered reasonable or commonsensical are anything but sensible. Many widely held views regarding current events, science, education, arts and literature, and many other topics ultimately prove to be wrong. The fact that an idea or view is widespread—held by many people—does not make it right.

Assignment:

Are widely held views often wrong, or are such views more likely to be correct? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

May 2008

Prompt 1

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Technological advances have freed society from tiresome labor, such as washing clothes by hand, hauling heavy loads, and walking long distances, and have given people increased access to information and entertainment. Yet, when given a choice, many people still resist using modern conveniences. There must be something to be gained from not using technology

Assignment:

Are there benefits to be gained from avoiding the use of modern technology, even when using it would make life easier? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 2

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

From talent contests to the Olympics to the Nobel and Pulitzer prizes, we constantly seek to reward those who are "number one." This emphasis on recognizing the winner creates the impression that other competitors, despite working hard and well, have lost. In many cases, however, the difference between the winner and the losers is slight. The wrong person may even be selected as the winner. Awards and prizes merely distract us from valuable qualities possessed by others besides the winners.

Assignment:

Do people place too much emphasis on winning? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 3

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

There are those who believe that everything we do is inspired by the desire for power in its various forms. They maintain that our actions are nothing but expressions of a striving for power. In this view, even when we act kindly toward other people, we are motivated, whether we know it or not, by a desire to have some control over their lives, for our act of kindness puts them partially in our power.

Adapted from Leszek Kolakowski, *Freedom, Fame, Lying, and Betrayal: Essays on Everyday Life*

Assignment:

Are people's actions motivated primarily by a desire for power over others? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 4

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Common sense suggests an obvious division between the past and present, between history and current events. In many cases, however, this boundary is not clear cut because earlier events are not locked away in the past. Events from history remain alive through people's memories and through books, films, and other media. For both individuals and groups, incidents from the past continue to influence the present—sometimes positively and sometimes negatively.

Assignment:

Do incidents from the past continue to influence the present? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

March 2008

Prompt 1

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Organizations or groups that share a common goal often mention teamwork as their secret to success by insisting that people in the group work together for the good of the entire group. However, by requiring each individual to accept the decisions of the others in the group, organizations may discourage the expression of individual talent. Ultimately, a group is most successful when all of its members are encouraged to pursue their own goals and interests.

Assignment:

Are organizations or groups most successful when their members pursue individual wishes and goals? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 2

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Being loyal—faithful or dedicated to someone or something—is not always easy. People often have conflicting loyalties, and there are no guidelines that help them decide to what or whom they should be loyal. Moreover, people are often loyal to something bad. Still, loyalty is one of the essential attributes a person must have and must demand of others.

Adapted from James Carville, *Stickin': The Case for Loyalty*

Assignment:

Should people always be loyal? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 3

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Winning feels forever fabulous. But you can learn more from losing than from winning. Losing prepares you for setback and tragedy more than winning ever can. Moreover, loss invites

reflection and a change of strategies. In the process of recovering from your losses, you learn how to avoid them the next time.

Adapted from Pat Conroy, *My Losing Season*

Assignment:

Do people learn more from losing than from winning? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

January 2008

Prompt 1

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

It is better to try to be original than to merely imitate others. People should always try to say, write, think, or create something new. There is little value in merely repeating what has been done before. People who merely copy or use the ideas and inventions of others, no matter how successful they may be, have never achieved anything significant.

Assignment:

Is it always better to be original than to imitate or use the ideas of others? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 2

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Often we see people who persist in trying to achieve a particular goal, even when all the evidence indicates that they will be unlikely to achieve it. When they succeed, we consider them courageous for having overcome impossible obstacles. But when they fail, we think of them as

headstrong, foolhardy, and bent on self-destruction. To many people, great effort is only worthwhile when it results in success.

Adapted from Gilbert Brim, "Ambition"

Assignment:

Is the effort involved in pursuing any goal valuable, even if the goal is not reached? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 3

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Newness has become our obsession. Novelty is more interesting to us than continuing with whatever is "tried and true." We discard the old so we can acquire the most recent model, the latest version, the newest and most improved formula. Often, we replace what is useful just because it is no longer new. Not only with material goods but also with cultural values, we prefer whatever is the latest trend.

Assignment:

Should people always prefer new things, ideas, or values to those of the past? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 4

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Since we live in a global society, surely we should view ourselves as citizens of the whole world. But instead, people choose to identify and associate with smaller and more familiar groups. People think of themselves as belonging to families, nations, cultures, and generations—or as belonging to smaller groups whose members share ideas, views, or common experiences. All of

these kinds of groups may offer people a feeling of security but also prevent them from learning or experiencing anything new.

Assignment:

Is there any value for people to belong only to a group or groups with which they have something in common? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

December 2007

Prompt 1

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. The first problem for all of us is not to learn but to unlearn. We hold on to ideas that were accepted in the past, and we are afraid to give them up. Preconceptions about what is right or wrong, true or false, good or bad are embedded so deeply in our thinking that we honestly may not know that they are there. Whether it's women's role in society or the role of our country in the world, the old assumptions just don't work anymore.

Adapted from Gloria Steinem, "A New Egalitarian Lifestyle"

Assignment:

Do people need to "unlearn," or reject, many of their assumptions and ideas? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 2

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. Our determination to pursue truth by setting up a fight between two sides leads us to believe that every issue has two sides no more, no less. If we know both sides of an issue, all of the relevant information will emerge, and the best case will be made for each side. But this process does not

always lead to the truth. Often the truth is somewhere in the complex middle, not the oversimplified extremes.

Adapted from Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture*

Assignment:

Should people choose one of two opposing sides of an issue, or is the truth usually found "in the middle"? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 3

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. All around us appearances are mistaken for reality. Clever advertisements create favorable impressions but say little or nothing about the products they promote. In stores, colorful packages are often better than their contents. In the media, how certain entertainers, politicians, and other public figures appear is more important than their abilities. All too often, what we think we see becomes far more important than what really is.

Assignment:

Do images and impressions have too much of an effect on people? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 4

Until fairly recently, technological innovations and inventions were intended to serve basic human needs or desires. Today, however, the most important and urgent problem confronting us is no longer the satisfaction of basic needs. The primary purpose of modern technology is to solve the unintended problems caused by the technology of years past.

Adapted from Dennis Gabor, *Innovations: Scientific, Technological, and Social*

Assignment:

Is the most important purpose of technology today different from what it was in the past? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

November 2007

Prompt 1

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

People today have so many choices. For instance, thirty years ago most television viewers could choose from only a few channels; today there are more than a hundred channels available. And choices do not just abound when it comes to the media. People have more options in almost every area of life. With so much to choose from, how can we not be happy?

Assignment:

Does having a large number of options to choose from make people happy? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 2

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

We are often urged to solve problems by ignoring traditional approaches and by finding solutions that are innovative or unconventional. We are encouraged to be creative and to trust that a new way of thinking will yield new insights. But innovation may be impractical and unnecessary. The best ways of fixing problems are often the tried-and-true ways.

Assignment:

Is it always necessary to find new solutions to problems? Plan and write an essay in which you

develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 3

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Many people consider the arts—literature, music, painting, and other creative activities—unnecessary because they provide us with nothing more than entertainment. Yet the arts are extremely valuable because they have much to teach us about the world around us and also because they help people find meaning in life.

Assignment:

Is the main value of the arts to teach us about the world around us? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 4

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

All people judge or criticize the ideas and actions of others. At times, these criticisms hurt or embarrass the people receiving them. Other criticisms seem to be intended to make the critics appear superior. And yet criticism is essential to our success as individuals and as a society.

Adapted from Ken Petress, "Constructive Criticism: A Tool for Improvement"

Assignment:

Is criticism—judging or finding fault with the ideas and actions of others—essential for personal well-being and social progress? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

October 2007

Prompt 1

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. A person does not simply "receive" his or her identity. Identity is much more than the name or features one is born with. True identity is something people must create for themselves by making choices that are significant and that require a courageous commitment in the face of challenges. Identity means having ideas and values that one lives by.

Adapted from Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*

Assignment:

Is identity something people are born with or given, or is it something people create for themselves? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 2

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. We value uniqueness and originality, but it seems that everywhere we turn, we are surrounded by ideas and things that are copies or even copies of copies. Writers, artists, and musicians seek new ideas for paintings, books, songs, and movies, but many sadly realize, "It's been done." The same is true for scientists, scholars, and businesspeople. Everyone wants to create something new, but at best we can hope only to repeat or imitate what has already been done.

Assignment:

Can people ever be truly original? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 3

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

All people who have achieved greatness in something knew what they excelled at. These people identified the skills that made them special—good judgment, or courage, or a special artistic or literary talent—and focused on developing these skills. Yet most people achieve superiority in nothing because they fail to identify and develop their greatest attribute.

Adapted from Baltasar Gracián y Morales, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

Assignment:

Do people achieve greatness only by finding out what they are especially good at and developing that attribute above all else? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 4

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Having many admirers is one way to become a celebrity, but it is not the way to become a hero. Heroes are self-made. Yet in our daily lives we see no difference between "celebrities" and "heroes." For this reason, we deprive ourselves of real role models. We should admire heroes—people who are famous because they are great—but not celebrities—people who simply seem great because they are famous.

Adapted from Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*

Assignment:

Should we admire heroes but not celebrities? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.